



Investigation of Child Abuse Incidence in Akwa Ibom State: The Social Implications and Remedial Measures for Sustainable Development in Akwa Ibom State Communities

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Abstract: Child abuse has profound and far-reaching effects on society, impacting individuals, families, and communities. The consequences of child abuse manifest in various dimensions, encompassing physical, emotional, and social aspects, thereby contributing to a range of societal challenges. The study aims to investigate child abuse incidence in Akwa Ibom State, the social implications, and remedial measures for sustainable development in our communities. The emotional toll of child abuse is substantial, leading to mental health disorders, low self-esteem, and difficulties forming healthy relationships. These individual repercussions extend to the societal level as survivors of child abuse may face challenges in education, employment, and overall functioning, perpetuating cycles of disadvantage. The study reviewed the effects of child abuse in society, the cases of child abuse, and the impact of child abuse on sustainable development in Akwa Ibom State communities. In carrying out the study, a descriptive survey design was adopted. The study was carried out in Akwa Ibom State. The targeted population for the study comprised all social scientists in Akwa Ibom State. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select 30 social scientists from 5 local government areas each and this gave a sample size of 150 respondents. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled “Child Abuse and Remedies Questionnaire (CARQ)”. Face and content validation of the instrument was carried out by an expert in test, measurement and evaluation in order to ensure that the instrument has the accuracy, appropriateness, and completeness for the study under consideration. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.78, and this was high enough to justify the use of the instrument. On this basis, the study concluded that the social implications of child abuse extend beyond individual suffering, impacting the very foundation of our communities. As we reflect on the findings, it becomes evident that sustainable development in Akwa Ibom State hinges on our collective ability to address these challenges comprehensively and with a steadfast commitment to the well-being of our children. The remedial measures adopted include education and awareness programmes, mental health services, legal reforms and enforcement as well as school-based prevention programs. One of the recommendations made was that the government should develop and strengthen support services for both victims and families affected by child abuse. This includes establishing counseling and rehabilitation programs that address the psychological, emotional, and social needs of the victims.

Keywords: Child Abuse Incidence, Social Implications, Remedial Measures Sustainable Development, Communities and Akwa Ibom State.

Introduction

Investigations into child abuse incidents are a serious issue that lies beneath the surface in the

quieter parts of Akwa Ibom State. Due to the societal ramifications of this obscure issue, which have a long-term negative impact on our communities' future, it has to be brought to light. Because they are the most defenseless members of society, children are frequently the targets of abuse, depriving them of the opportunity to grow up in a safe, supportive environment that is vital to their overall development. Uncovering the systemic issues that jeopardize the foundation of our societies, the Akwa Ibom State child abuse investigation is not only a legal problem but also a pressing social call to action. Smith, Robinson, and Segal (2023) state that child abuse is not just about black eyes; ignoring a child's needs, putting them in unsupervised, dangerous situations, exposing them to sexual situations, or making them feel worthless or stupid also forms part of child abuse, and they can leave deep, lasting scars on children. As investigators delve into the heart-wrenching cases, the social implications reverberate across the community landscape. The scars of abuse, both visible and hidden, ripple through the lives of victims, affecting their mental and emotional well-being. Beyond individual suffering, the collective impact on communities is profound, eroding trust and corroding the social bonds that knit society together. The investigation becomes a mirror, reflecting not only the prevalence of child abuse but also the societal norms and structures that inadvertently contribute to its persistence.

But despite this dismal reality, there is still a chance for improvement. To promote healing and resilience in our communities, corrective actions based on a dedication to sustainable development may be put into place. Education campaigns that highlight the rights of children and the negative effects of abuse may be a potent instrument for changing public perceptions. For vulnerable children to have a safety net, statutory and informal child protection services must be strengthened. By supporting and putting these corrective actions into action, Akwa Ibom State can lead the way toward sustainable development, which places a high priority on each child's well-being and guarantees a better future for the whole community. According to Leverage Edu (2021), sustainable development aims to strike a balance between meeting the requirements of present demands while not overlooking the needs of future generations. It acknowledges nature's requirements along with humans' aim to work towards the development of different aspects of the world. The need for sustainable development is not only for the survival of mankind but also for its future protection.

Objectives of the study

1. To find out the extent of child abuse in Akwa Ibom State.
2. To find out the remedial measures to child abuse in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Questions

3. What is the extent of child abuse in Akwa Ibom State?
4. What are the remedial measures to child abuse in Akwa Ibom State?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Child Abuse

According to the Cleveland Clinic (2023), child abuse is hurting a child. It occurs when a child experiences harm or neglect. Jenkins (2023) pointed out that the willful infliction of pain and suffering on children through physical, sexual, or emotional mistreatment is child abuse. Prior to the 1970s, the term child abuse normally referred to only physical mistreatment; its application has expanded to include, in addition to inordinate physical violence, unjustifiable verbal abuse; the failure to furnish proper shelter, nourishment, medical treatment, or emotional support; incest and other cases of sexual abuse, molestation, or rape; and the use of children in prostitution or pornography. Smith, Robinson, and Segal (2023) state that child abuse is not just about black eyes; ignoring a child's needs, putting them in unsupervised, dangerous situations, exposing them to sexual situations, or making them feel worthless or stupid also forms a part of child abuse, and they can leave deep, lasting scars on children. Olusegun and Idowu (2016) added that child abuse in Nigeria negatively affects the future of children and destroys the image of the country.

Children suffer from various forms of abuse, such as child marriages, molestation, child labour, kidnapping, and neglect, among other forms.

According to Brazier (2018), child abuse refers to any emotional, sexual, or physical mistreatment or neglect by an adult in a role of responsibility toward someone who is under 18 years of age. Child abuse refers to any kind of action or failure to act that results in harm or possible harm to a child. The adult may be a parent, other family member, or another caregiver, including sports coaches, teachers, and so on. According to the World Health Organization (2023), child maltreatment is the abuse and neglect that occurs to children under 18 years of age. It includes all types of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence, and commercial or other exploitation that results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development, or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power. Holland (2019) states that child abuse is any mistreatment or neglect that causes harm to a child 18 years old or younger. This can include sexual, emotional, and physical abuse, as well as neglect. The mistreatment is caused by an adult, often one with a role of responsibility in the child's life. The person responsible for the abuse may be a parent or family member. It can also be someone acting as a caregiver or with authority in the child's life, including a coach, teacher, or religious leader.

According to the Mayo Clinic (2023), child health experts condemn the use of violence in any form. Although most people use physical punishment, such as spanking, to discipline their children, spanking forms part of child abuse. While parents and caregivers often use physical punishment with the intention of helping their children or making their behaviour better, research shows that spanking is linked with worse behaviour. It is also linked to mental health problems, difficult relationships with parents, lower self-esteem, and lower academic performance. Any physical punishment may leave emotional scars. Parental behaviours that cause pain, physical injury, or emotional trauma, even when done in the name of discipline, could be child abuse. According to Alberta (2023), neglect is any lack of care that causes serious harm to a child's development or endangers the child in any way. Failure to meet the child's day-to-day basic physical needs includes not providing adequate nutrition, clothing, shelter, health care, appropriate supervision, and protection from harm is child abuse.

Concept of Sustainable Development

Sustainable development (SD) is a holistic approach that seeks to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. According to International Institute of Sustainable Development (2023) sustainable development has been defined in many ways, but the most frequently quoted definition is from Our Common Future or Brundtland Commission, which defines sustainable development as the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development is a guiding framework that creates a world where children can grow up in a safe and nurturing environment. The concept of sustainable development was originally introduced by the Brundtland Commission in 1987. It encompasses the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of a country's growth. According to Leverage Edu (2021), sustainable development aims to strike a balance between meeting the requirements of present demands while not overlooking the needs of future generations. It acknowledges nature's requirements along with humans' aim to work towards the development of different aspects of the world. The need for sustainable development is not only for the survival of mankind but also for its future protection. Abubakar (2017) argues that SD is a core concept within global development policy and agenda. It provides a mechanism through which society can interact with the environment while not risking damaging the resource for the future (Mensah, 2019).

Children are the future and the key to protecting the economic, political, social, and environmental future of their country; consequently, what they receive while growing up is likely to be what they will exude to the world in the future. If, when growing up, they are abused (physically, emotionally, sexually, or psychologically), that will most likely be what they will

give back to society, and this will hinder the realization of the 17 SDGs as expected by 2030. Safeguarding the wellbeing of children is equivalent to safeguarding the sustainable future our society is trying to create. While creating strategies to implement policies and practices in harmony with sustainable development goals, which is crucial for constructing a better future, it is also worthy to note that sustainability depends in building the future and the future resides on the arms of the young ones abusing them will lead to them abusing the world.

Cases of Child Abuse Incidence

An average Nigerian child has been abused at least once in their lifetime. Edo (2021) posits that in Nigeria, child abuse and neglect is prevalent in the everyday life of a child but it receives little or no attention by the society. Abuse in all its forms are daily realities for many Nigerian children. According to UNICEF (2017) abuse in all its forms are a daily reality for many Nigerian children. UNICEF observed that six out of every 10 children has experienced some form of violence – one in four girls and 10 per cent of boys have been victims of sexual violence. Nigeria has as a country as observed by UNICEF has the largest number of child brides in Africa with more than 23 million girls and women who were married as children, most of them from poor and rural communities.

In the United States, the National Children's Alliance (2023), has observed that more than 600,000 children are abused each year. The Centers for Disease Control in 2018, approximated about 678,000 victims of child abuse and neglect. The cases of child abuse encompasses various forms of abuse, including physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, and emotional abuse, child marriages, molestation, child labour, kidnapping, and neglect, among other forms (Olusegun and Idowo, 2016). It is important to note that even in the United States, these figures likely represent only a fraction of the actual prevalence, as many cases go unreported or undetected due to factors like secrecy, fear, or lack of awareness. Similarly, the United Kingdom faces its share of child abuse cases. The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) reported over 58,000 children identified as needing protection from abuse in the 2019-2020 period. Globally, child abuse is a pervasive problem. UNICEF estimates that millions of children experience abuse each year, emphasizing the need for a coordinated international response.

Regions affected by conflict, poverty, and weak child protection infrastructure may be particularly susceptible to high rates of child abuse. Efforts to combat child abuse involve a combination of legal frameworks, social services, and public awareness campaigns. Many countries have established hotlines and support services to encourage the reporting of abuse and ensure timely intervention. For instance, in the United States, the Child help National Child Abuse Hotline provides confidential assistance to individuals seeking information or reporting abuse. These services play a vital role in breaking the silence surrounding child abuse and providing support to victims and their families.

Effect of Child Abuse

Child abuse has profound and far-reaching effects on society, impacting individuals, families, and communities. The consequences of child abuse manifest in various dimensions, encompassing physical, emotional, and social aspects, thereby contributing to a range of societal challenges. Olusegun and Idowu (2016) stated that child abuse in Nigeria negatively affects the future of children and destroys the image of the country. While Child abuse is a prevalent occurrence globally it has been an age long challenge in Nigeria.

Child abuse has profound and far-reaching effects on society, impacting individuals, families, and communities. The consequences of child abuse manifest in various dimensions, encompassing physical, emotional, and social aspects, thereby contributing to a range of societal challenges. In terms of individual impact, children who experience abuse may suffer from physical injuries, developmental delays, and long-term health issues. The emotional toll is substantial, leading to mental health disorders, low self-esteem, and difficulties forming healthy relationships. These individual repercussions extend to the societal level as survivors of child

abuse may face challenges in education, employment, and overall functioning, perpetuating cycles of disadvantage. (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013).

Children who are abused and neglected are often fearful and have trust issues. They may have difficulty communicating and maintaining relationships. They may be insecure, anxious, aggressive, withdrawn, or clingy (Medicinenet, 2023). Some of the people who were abused as children tend to commit suicide later in life. In particular, young people might be subjected to attempted suicide and suicidal ideation as a result of the abuse and neglect that they suffered during their childhood. Child abuse often leads to substance abuse and addiction later in life. This is particularly true due to the psychological consequences that arise from such abuse early in life. When children suffer abuse and neglect at a young age, they have a higher likelihood of experiencing disorganized and insecure attachment issues with the perpetrator of the crime. The patterns of attachment between the child and the caregiver are important for the early social and emotional development of the child. When children struggle with insecure attachment from an early age, they should be able to receive comfort, protection, and safety from their caregivers. Child neglect and abuse could lead to learning difficulties and poor academic and scholastic achievement. Neglect and abuse during the formative years could also affect the developmental capabilities and capacities of the affected victims. This is particularly true for the areas of the brain that are critical for language and speech. Maltreated children, to this end, tend to suffer from lower academic achievements than their otherwise healthy peers. These children could also have to struggle with delays in their language development (Tpartnership.org, 2023).

Families are also significantly affected, as child abuse can strain relationships, disrupt family dynamics, and contribute to cycles of intergenerational abuse. The breakdown of family units due to abuse can strain social support systems and place additional burdens on child welfare services, leading to societal costs in terms of healthcare, social services, and legal interventions. Furthermore, child abuse contributes to a range of societal issues. Adults who experienced abuse as children may struggle with substance abuse, criminal behaviour, and involvement in violent relationships. The societal costs associated with treating these issues, maintaining law and order, and providing rehabilitation services are substantial.

Impact of child Abuse in Sustainable Development

Sustainable development aims to create a world where social, economic, and environmental well-being are prioritized for present and future generations. However, the prevalence of child abuse poses a significant challenge to the attainment of these goals. Sustainable development, as Mboho and Ndaeyo (2019) sees it, is an embodiment of the highest aspirations for a better world that reflects our greatest responsibility as a global community. Owolabi (2012) states that sustainable development is about establishing the past on top of the present for a better tomorrow without handicapping the prospects of the future. Child abuse has a negative impact on the sustainable development of any nation since no nation can develop sustainably if the children, who are the future managers of the nation's social, economic, and political development, are not properly taken care of as provided by the Child's Rights Act (CRA) (Mboho and Ndaeyo, 2019).

Azuka and Patrick (2019) add that sustainable development is developed based on the ideologies of human rights, which are structured for the self-esteem and self-worth of human beings to seek guaranteed freedom from fear and want. In the context of children, sustainable development aims to provide children and young people with the services, skills, and opportunities they need to build better futures for themselves, their families, and their societies in the future. The sustainable future of any country is dependent on the hands of the young generation. According to the OECD (2015), the well-being of children at present translates into the well-being of adults tomorrow. The protection of children from all forms of violence is a fundamental right enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. SDG 16.2 in the 2030 Agenda provides for sustainable development for all forms of violence against children, which gives impetus towards the realization of the right of every child to live free from fear, neglect, abuse, and exploitation. SDG target 5.3 addresses specific forms of violence and harm towards children, such as child

marriage and female genital mutilation, and target 8.7 centers on the eradication of child labour, including the recruitment and use of child soldiers (Lepcha and Paul, 2021).

In 2015, world leaders adopted the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, which includes the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The realization of these sustainable development goals can only be achieved when the future leaders and environmentalists are in the right state of mind and sees the society as a future to protect. If the society fails to protect the child, the child will grow up and also fail to protect the society. Azuka and Patrick (2019) argue that sustainable development is developed based on the ideologies of human rights that are structured around regard for the self-esteem and worth of human beings and seek to guarantee freedom from fear and want. It seeks to magnify the choices of everyone, regardless of being male, female, or a child, in present and future generations while safeguarding the natural systems that everything relies upon.

According to Owolabi (2012), sustainable development is establishing the past on top of the present for a better tomorrow without handicapping the prospects of the future. Therefore, sustainable development comprises anything that nature and humanity need to maintain existence presently and in the future. In order for sustainable development to happen in any country, the value system of the citizenry ought to be one that encourages an excellent social process with regard to political and economic participation in terms of resource allocation. Sciberras (2015), points out that “sustainable development embodies integration, comprehension, and acting on the complicated links that exist between society, the environment, and the economy” and such a link can only be forged through a child. The Child’s Rights Act has the potential to eradicate or reduce child abuse in Nigeria since it serves the best interest of the child and the future of sustainability.

Remedial Measures in Combating Child Abuse for Sustainable Development in Communities

Addressing child abuse for sustainable development in communities requires a comprehensive set of remedial measures.

Education and Awareness Programmes: Educational campaigns are crucial in raising awareness about child abuse. Organizations like UNICEF emphasize the importance of education and awareness to prevent child maltreatment (UNICEF, 2020).

Parenting Support Programmes: Evidence suggests that parenting programs can effectively reduce the risk of child abuse. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends parenting interventions to enhance parent-child relationships and prevent child maltreatment (AAP, 2018).

Community Engagement and Mobilization: Community engagement is recognized as a powerful tool in preventing child abuse. The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes the role of communities in promoting child well-being and preventing violence (WHO, 2016).

Mental Health Services: Addressing parental mental health is crucial in preventing child abuse. The National Institute of Mental Health highlights the association between parental mental health and child well-being, emphasizing the need for mental health support (NIMH, n.d.).

Legal Reforms and Enforcement: Legal reforms play a key role in combating child abuse. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) outlines legal principles to protect children from abuse and exploitation.

School-Based Prevention Programs: School-based programmes contribute to preventing child abuse. The CDC recommends school-based programs that focus on creating safe and supportive environments for children (CDC, 2016).

METHODOLOGY

In carrying out the study, a descriptive survey design was adopted. The study was carried out in Akwa Ibom State. The targeted population for the study comprised all social scientists in Akwa

Ibom State. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select 30 social scientists from 5 local government areas each and this gave a sample size of 150 respondents. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled “Child Abuse and Remedies Questionnaire (CARQ)”. Face and content validation of the instrument was carried out by an expert in test, measurement and evaluation in order to ensure that the instrument has the accuracy, appropriateness, and completeness for the study under consideration. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.78, and this was high enough to justify the use of the instrument. The researcher subjected the data generated for this study to appropriate statistical techniques such as percentage analysis to answer research questions and simple regression for hypothesis.

Results and discussions

Research Questions 1: The research question sought to find out the extent of child abuse in Nigeria. To answer the research question percentage analysis was performed on the data, (see table 1).

Table 1: Percentage analysis of the extent of child abuse in Nigeria

EXTENTS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
VERY HIGH EXTENT	64	42.66**
HIGH EXTENT	40	26.66
LOW EXTENT	32	21.33
VERY LOW EXTENT	14	9.33*
TOTAL	150	100%

**** The highest percentage frequency**

*** The least percentage frequency**

SOURCE: Field survey

The above table 1 presents the percentage analysis of the extent of child abuse in Nigeria. From the result of the data analysis, it was observed that the highest percentage (42.66%) of the respondents affirmed that the extent of child abuse in Nigeria is of “very high extent”, while the least percentage (9.33%) of the respondents stated that the extent of child abuse in Nigeria is of “very low extent”.

Research Questions 2: The research question sought to find out the remedial measures for child abuse in Akwa Ibom State. To answer the research question percentage analysis was performed on the data, (see table 2).

Table 2: Percentage analysis of the remedial measures for child abuse in Akwa Ibom State

REMEDIES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Education and Awareness Programmes	57	38**
Mental Health Services	33	22
Legal Reforms and Enforcement	94	62.66
School-Based Prevention Programmes	23	15.33*
TOTAL	150	100%

**** The highest percentage frequency**

*** The least percentage frequency**

SOURCE: Field survey

The above table 2 presents the percentage analysis of the remedial measures for child abuse in

Akwa Ibom State. From the result of the data analysis, it was observed that the highest percentage (38%) of the respondents affirmed that in Akwa Ibom State, the remedial measures taken to curb child abuse in the state is “Education and Awareness Programmes”, while the least percentage (15.33%) of the respondents stated that the remedial measures to be “School-Based Prevention Programmes”.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the social implications of child abuse are profound, extending beyond individual suffering to impact the very foundation of our communities. As we reflect on the findings, it becomes evident that sustainable development in Akwa Ibom State hinges on our collective ability to address these challenges comprehensively and with a steadfast commitment to the well-being of our children. The remedial measures proposed, inspired by international frameworks and evidence-based strategies, provide a roadmap for transformation. By aligning with the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and drawing upon successful models such as the WHO's INSPIRE framework, Akwa Ibom State can forge a path toward a future where children are shielded from harm, and their rights are upheld. Implementing and enforcing laws, changing societal norms, and providing robust support services are essential components of a holistic approach that not only mitigates the immediate impact of child abuse but also contributes to the sustainable development of our communities.

Recommendation

1. The government should develop and strengthen support services for both victims and families affected by child abuse. This includes establishing counseling and rehabilitation programs that address the psychological, emotional, and social needs of the victims.
2. The Government should enhance and enforce existing laws related to child protection, ensuring that they align with international standards set forth by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This includes stricter penalties for perpetrators of child abuse, streamlined reporting mechanisms, and increased collaboration between law enforcement agencies, social services, and community organizations.
3. The government should launch comprehensive awareness campaigns aimed at educating communities about the rights of children, the signs of abuse, and the importance of reporting such incidents. Engage schools, religious institutions, and community leaders as advocates to disseminate information and foster a culture that prioritizes child protection. These programs can also include training sessions for teachers, healthcare professionals, and law enforcement personnel to recognize and respond effectively to child abuse cases.

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